

DENNIS TREITLER SEPTEMBER 25, 1987
INTERVIEWED BY DAVE HALL
AUDIO OF VIDEO RECORDING

[During the course of interview, Mr. Hall and Mr. Treitler are in a pirogue or boat, either paddling or using the motor. They are touring the area in which Mr. Treitler works as a March Manager.]

MR. HALL: This is an audio recording of videotape done with Dennis Treitler on September 25, 1987. This is tape #1.

MR. TREITLER: ...he had his caller. He had a good bottle of wine. Everything had to be precise. That's how he did when he hunted; everything had to be precise.

MR. HALL: You hunted in this same pond when you were a little boy?

MR. TREITLER: Right here. This is where, I tell you what, on the other side of this point here, the reason that he picked this one particular point was because of the points and the pockets and we could blind on any kind of wind. It didn't made no difference. You could come here, the grass was way higher than it is now and you could come in here and pick a blind and never worry about anything. And you could always blind right.

MR. HALL: Was there many duck in them days?

MR. TREITLER: Oh my God! When we come in to this pond, paddling in here at night I don't know how many thousands was in here. But they would get up from the water and it would actually hurt your ears. It would be from the mouth of the little bayou all the way in here. All the time you were putting the decoys out and all the time you were getting the blind set up it was just sold ducks. I tell you what, if you would have been here, you could have seen how much ducks they had! And how easy it was to take and be market hunter.

MR. HALL: Well, your Daddy was a market hunter and sold the ducks.

MR. TREITLER: My Dad sold to, I'm not going to name the restaurant, but he sold to four of five leading restaurants in New Orleans. Okay, and we had to be out the blind by a certain time every morning. They had a Negro who used to come down and take and pick the ducks up. We used to put them in sacks and put them in the truck of the car. The old man, he had a standing order from each restaurant. They preferred mostly mallards and pintails. In those days this area here had a lot of mallards and pintails. We used to use spoonbills, grays and widgeons mostly for decoys. We'd leave them sitting in the water. They just had that many.

MR. HALL: When you went out hunting how many ducks would you kill?

MR. TREITLER: Well now I'll tell you, on an average day he'd kill forty or fifty pairs, sometimes on the weekends there, they might double it. It wasn't any problem.

MR. HALL: He had no problems in selling his ducks?

MR. TREITLER: None. None whatsoever. In fact, once the word got out that he was a good hunter; he wouldn't take and bust the ducks up really bad; he had more business than what he really cared for. But he used to deal with these four big restaurants. He used to be on a first name basis. The owners knew him really, really well.

MR. HALL: When you came up as a kid then, violating the migratory bird laws was just sort of natural or what? Tell me about it.

MR. TREITLER: Well, I tell you; when I was a kid, okay, really never worried about game laws, or migratory laws or stuff like that. They had so many ducks that you just thought they would never, ever run out. And every year it was the same thing. As we got to be a little older, okay, the law started, they started cracking down on the market hunters. And they started having less and less ducks. Finally, the old man just gave it up. He saw that there wasn't any future in it. But when we was kids, to him and to us too, it wasn't like breaking the law. He was at work, you know? He went to work every morning. This was his job. He had "X" amount of ducks to kill every day. He'd go in. He'd sell his ducks. He used to load his own shells. It was just part of the routine, part of the job. He didn't think he was doing anything wrong.

MR. HALL: Dennis, you've lived in this marsh basically all your life; did anybody obey the migratory bird law that you know of?

MR. TREITLER: At what time, back then?

MR. HALL: Yeah.

MR. TREITLER: No. No. I tell you what, like I told you before; people just took it for granted that the ducks would never, ever run out. And if you would have seen the amount of ducks that was in here, you would have thought the same thing. You'd be getting ready to shoot, there'd be twenty-five or thirty French ducks lighting in a pond ten, twelve yards out. There might be two or three hundred more rolling around this area. There'd be ducks lighting on the other side of the pond. It was just duck, you never thought that. You never thought that the ducks would run out. You just didn't.

MR. HALL: But everybody violated the law...

MR. TREITLET: Everybody did. At that time, everybody violated. And really, I'm going to tell you, you really didn't have to violate because the limits were so big then. But at that time in the history of the country, this Depression was going on and people needed the money. Down in this little fishing community there's no jobs. You made your living off the land and like I say, you really didn't think you was doing anything wrong. You were just getting the bills paid.

MR. HALL: And this attitude has just continued on basically?

MR. TREITLER: Basically, up until the last, I'd say about the last ten of fifteen years, yeah. It wasn't nothing to come out here at night, poule deau used to be so thick in here you could come in here at night with a light; take the plug out your gun, paddle almost right in the middle of the raft, put the light on in the middle and the whole raft of poule deau, ninety percent of them swims to the light. You'd unload five loads in them; your pirogue couldn't hold them. Cripples everywhere, you didn't even worry about the cripples. You thought that they just had a solid stream of poule deau from up north all the way down here. That's how much they had.

MR. HALL: Dennis, some of your outlaw buddies got caught last year with about a hundred and fifty or sixty over the limit, and the went to prison for it. Tell me about what that has done down here.

MR. TREITLER: Well, I am going to give a 'for example', okay? The guys that got caught, I used to hunt with them. My Dad hunted with their Dad. I hunted with their fathers, they hunted with my father. It was a real little, little tight knit thing there. They got caught killing all of these ducks; and what it did, it put the fear of death in these people down here. Now, I tell you what, since that went down, there's hardly no violating at all. Period. You have some people that might kill a couple of ducks over the limit, you know. And a few years back, I would've done the same thing. But all of the slaughter and mass killing, it's just about over with. It's just about a thing of the past. And it's a terrible thing for somebody to be made an example of, or to be a scapegoat but that's what it takes. You got to come down on somebody.

MR. HALL: Well these guys really were violating every law in the books, so...

MR. TREITLER: Every one.

MR. HALL: ...so they deserved going to jail then?

MR. TREITLER: I tell you what; they killed way over the limit. They killed ducks that they shouldn't have killed. Every rule, every law pertaining to the duck hunting and the boating and everything, they broke it. Laws are made for people to obey.

MR. HALL: Were you outlawed with them for years?

MR. TREITLER: For years. I tell you what, when I got out of the Navy in 1964 I got out of the Navy. I was stationed in Charleston. I came down here and I got out right about a week before the duck [season], and the New Orleans Sportsmen's League had their Duck Calling Contest. Our family and their families were really into this duck thing. We were really duck oriented, our whole lives. I went to the Sheraton Charles Hotel. I went to the duck-calling contest. I won the contest that year. My Dad came in second. My brother come in third. This friend of ours Dad came in fourth. My Uncle come in fifth. We just about took the first ten places, you know, friends and relatives. The next day, we went and go build blinds. We went back in [sounds like] Kenawbin right in the same are where these guys got caught. And we wound up making us a little sneak while the ducks were there. The old man and me and this boy's Daddy scouted the area there and the ducks were there. And we killed a hundred and twenty something or thereabouts in about an hour. It would buzz the point of the decoys and the bait so thick. You didn't hardly need a blind they were so tame. They lit the water, you'd kill ten, twelve, fifteen every shot, cripples you left in the water. We took and made the hunt. We came back. We divided the ducks up. At this point in time, when the old man stopped violating and when we stopped selling the ducks we used to eat a lot of ducks. We killed mostly for food. And even at that time I didn't really think that I was doing anything wrong.

MR. HALL: It's just been a way of life then?

MR. TREITLER: That was it. I tell you what, we, it was synonymous; you go duck hunting, you kill every duck you could kill until you run out of shells.

MR. HALL: You did that every hunt?

MR. TREITLER: Every hunt.

MR. HALL: And everybody you knew did that?

MR. TREITLER: And everybody we knew did it! I tell you what; it wasn't nothing that as hid. People would come in front duck hunts and they'd leave the ducks on the stern of the boat. Or, they'd leave them sitting in the boat. And I'm gonna tell 'ya, when you'd come in and you'd see the man and he wouldn't do you nothing, it was like putting a feather in your hat. You thought, "Man I done got over on this guy!"

Right before the tape ended, we were talking about these Game Wardens. The State Agents are really politically inclined, okay? And you could take and get caught, so see the right politician and get out of everything. One hunt in particular, this was on a Thanksgiving Day; my Dad and myself and my Uncle and one of the boy's Daddies that

got caught there; we made a hunt right in the same area. And we killed about two hundred, or better. And we had a icebox that we used to ice shrimp up. We had it full to the top. We pulled into the boat launch, I mean; it went into my Uncle's shed. It took six of us to take and pick the box up and put it on the wharf. The two Game Wardens and the time, I am not going to mention their names, but they were down here several years back; they came down there. *They sat right on top of this box of ducks and they never knew what they were sitting on! I'll tell you what, we would have probably did life, for this amount of ducks, okay?! And it was all good ducks!* They sat there and they talked to us and they were telling us where the biggest congregations of the ducks were. And we had hunted them there that morning. He didn't know that we was doing our homework as good as what he was doing his! Maybe a little bit better. The only thing, he didn't catch us. It was so funny, when they left we went to the barroom down the road and we all got drunk and it was big party just figuring out dumb these stupid sons of bitches was! They were sitting right... We'd have got life for this. I ain't kidding you! We'd have done some serious time. I'd probably still be washing dishes right now, okay? I tell you what, this thing, all it did okay? It just gave us a little more, how would you put it, a little more initiative to get out there and go kill a bunch more so we could get past the Game Wardens again. But we really didn't have to worry about it. Because all we had to do was go see the local politicians and we was out of it. This practice is still going on, *right now!* Not so much with the ducks, but with shrimp, fish, oysters, trapping and fishing crabs and stuff. You can get caught, and for forty, fifty pounds of shrimp, maybe a couple packs of oysters [he pronounces it "arryshters"] some ducks or something, you can get out of anything. This is going on right now, as I am talking to you right now. I tell you what, just a little while back some guys got caught, they got a little lake right back here. Lake Amandie. They got fishing there with an oversized gill bet. Okay? You're only allowed to have a twelve hundred foot net and these guys had one about five thousand feet. It took the whole lake, it one set. The State Agents caught them; took the net and the fish. When they got back from patrolling, they got a phone call. They gave the people back their net, and their fish! One phone call!

MR. HALL: Well does this encourage making game laws a joke?

MR. TREITLER: The average young man here doesn't, it just, it don't bother him. It's like, I guess it's like getting a slap on the hand and telling ya at the same time, 'look, just be careful next time, okay?' It's no problem. That's the general attitude, right now! Nothing bothers anybody. And something's got to be done about it!

MR. HALL: Dennis, let me ask you this; in your lifetime, has there been more illegal duck killed, or more legal ducks?

MR. TREITLER: About nine hundred times more illegal ducks. I'm going to give you just a for example, something for you to think about, okay? This pond that we're in right now is leased to some people. This pond costs these guys four hundred and fifty dollars

a season. By the time they take and pay their lease, guns, shells, decoys the whole nine yards. Would you come out here and let these mosquitoes eat your ass up for four ducks? At one time, I wouldn't do it. And most of these guys don't kill just the limit. They'll go out with the limit. They got a ice chest hid back here somewhere, with all of the birds gutted and iced down. They'll come back and get it at night, or in the evening. And I'm going to tell you something; last week when the season opened some friends of mine, good friends of mine, okay? Had got caught a couple of years back. They got their little slap on the hand. They went hunting [sounds like] back of Kenawbin. [sic?] The Game Wardens were on the levee watching them shoot okay? These guys saw them. They came out with just the limit, two of them did. They left about seventy or eighty birds in the prairie. The guy who was doing most of the killing, he saw what was going on. He crawled out on his hand and knees, okay? He hid on the levee by Canal Marine. He hid on the levee for about three or four hours till the Game Wardens left. They went back that night. They took and went and picked up all of the ducks. They had about a hundred and fifty or two hundred. Nobody did them nothing. The Man had them, right now, down here above us. These guys are laughing. And it's a joke too, okay? Because The Man had him and they got away with it. I don't think they might not necessarily go back and do it this weekend, but before the season is over with they'll do it several more times. And they'll think, okay, "S---, I got away with it once. Hell, I can get away with it again." That's the general attitude. That's the general idea or frame of mind that people have down here about killing ducks. It's a way of life. I tell you what; they make a game out of it. They laugh about it every weekend in the barrooms.

MR. HALL: And there's way more illegal ducks being killed than there are legal?

MR. TREITLER: I tell you what; the biggest concentration of the birds right now, from what I've been told by people okay? And from what I've seen; is in that Kenawbin area. These guys kill these ducks back there like you just don't know, mostly during the week. They'll take and find a little pond or they might put a hundred and fifty or two hundred piles of corn in it and get the birds in there as thick as the hair on your head, kill seventy or eighty. They're not going to go kill ten or twelve or fifteen or twenty. Because it's not enough, you know. When they go to kill, they go to kill! And they'll take and; they'll be giving ducks away for a week.

MR. HALL: Dennis, baiting is a problem isn't it?

MR. TREITLER: Sure is. I tell you what; you take a pond like this here, there's no feed in it. The only way that these guys are going to take and get ducks in these ponds it put bait in it; put feed in it, okay? And they know that from the air, the aeroplane can see corn, okay? So what they use mostly is milo and wheat and barley, because it's brown and blends in with the bottom and it can't be seen from the air too good.

MR. HALL: Have you shot ducks over bait?

MR. TREITLER: Thousands of times!

MR. HALL: It works, doesn't it?

MR. TREITLER: It's the deadliest thing that I've ever seen. I tell you what; once the birds get used to taking and coming in over corn and that, they're so tame, like I'm sitting in this blind right now. I wouldn't have to be sitting down. I could be standing up. I could put a few little canes around me and throw a hand full of decoys. I've already seen already, you shoot on them; they leave the pond, you call them back and you shoot on them again until you got two thirds of them. After the hunt would be over with you put a couple of hundred pounds of corn or feed in your pond, you come back the next day and kill the same ducks til you kill them all.

MR. HALL: What's the worst violation that can be committed?

MR. TREITLER: I tell you what; that's a hard one. 'Cause I been committed them all, a hundred times over. Right now, I think killing ducks after the season when they take and band up to go up north. That's when we used to kill our ducks. When the season would be over with usually around the end of February and the beginning of March the ducks are the fattest. There's no pinfeathers on them. They're all in love. They're getting ready to be in love real bad. All they got on they're mind is baby ducks, and I'm going to tell you what; when they come over the decoys, all it is, is just death. And that's it!

MR. HALL: You shot plenty of them in closed season?

MR. TREITLER: Oh my God! That's when we used to kill most of them. Sometimes Dad would, the old man would take and guide. He'd take "sports" out during the duck season and I'd guide. We'd take and hunt for the "sports" for money. But when the ducks for our freezer was always killed after the season, always. And always between the end of February and the middle of March, right when the biggest congregations of them are here. It's just like when they go back up north; it's just like when they first come down. They're so stupid. You kill so many and you can be so choosy and so particular. We used to kill just what we wanted. Our biggest, and even now, our favorite ducks are teals and spoonbills. I don't care too much for big ducks too much. I like the teal. And I love the spoonbill, okay? Down here we call them a mequante. That's what I like. I like those the best.

MR. HALL: Everybody was hunting them that way too, weren't they?

MR. TREITLER: [chuckling] Yeah, that's true. Mostly at that time of the year, okay, all of the trapping was over with and most of the hunters, trappers and fishermen would have a little break, more like a vacation. That was their pastime. That was their vacation.

They'd go and sit in a blind and they'd enjoy themselves. They'd kill all the ducks they wanted to kill, and all that their freezers could hold. And all of the freezers of their friends could hold.

MR. HALL: Well Dennis, the ducks are a lot fewer now than they used to be.

MR. TREITLER: I'll tell you what; yeah, what you're saying is true. We never really realized that. I guess till about maybe fifteen, eighteen years ago; twenty years ago tops. The last outlaw hunt I made or that my Day made, where we really killed was back by Bayou Bienvenue. [?] It was right before my eighteenth birthday. It was right before I went in the Navy. I was trapping back there and I fell on a spot of ducks. There must have been fifteen or twenty thousand on this one pond. What the old man and I did, was we took the two pirogues and a flatboat and we went back the bayou. The old man, he took the boat, we had some fishing poles and some fish that we had got the day before. We put them in a ice chest. I took the ducks and I paddled out through the back of [sounds like] Carolinpaques, through the swamp. And the old took and went out to the boat launch there. He was as legal as he could be. He had his little license and the whole nine yards. The Game Wardens checked him. "Hey how 'ya doing Mr. Herb" and all of that. I was going through Carolinpaques with enough ducks there to take care of the whole family there for about a month.

MR. HALL: How many did you all kill that day?

MR. TREITLER: About two hundred, or two hundred and fifty. The only reason that we stopped killing was we ran out of shells. I told the old man. I said, "Pops, don't take and bring just a little handful of shells. The ducks are there we baited them." I wanted him to bring a case. I figured we'd have shot the case down by ten o'clock. They were so thick. And they answered the caller so good. You put a little toot on them with that caller and I mean, boy, they come over them decoys and they were just in your face. You couldn't miss. And we had a thing okay, like we'd try to kill as many ducks as we could with as less shells. We'd always start at the top duck. We'd kill the top one first. We leave the ones on the bottom. When we'd kill him, he'd fall. The one's on the bottom were coming up and the one's on the top were still going down and they'd bunch up like that. Usually when they'd bunch for an instant, you could take and kill eight or ten with one shot. It was such a mass confusion; the ducks didn't know what to do! The only ones who knew what they was doing was the guys in the blind, with these automatics with no plugs in them. Okay? And look, you take two people who know what they're doing with this thing and I'll tell you what; they'll kill every duck that comes into the pond without even blinking crooked. And I'll tell you, look, my Dad, my self, my friends and our family, in this area here, we've killed more ducks than anybody down here. And I don't want you to think that I am bragging. Because it's not bragging, okay. Now, at the time it was bragging. But now, it's a sin. And I gave duck hunting up for about seven or eight years. I quit.

MR. HALL: Why did you quit Dennis?

MR. TREITLER: I am going to tell you. I couldn't take and hunt and I couldn't kill the way that I wanted to. Killing was such a synonymous thing. It was expected. You got in that blind; you were supposed to kill! We were so afraid of getting caught that we just gave it up. I am going to tell you; last week was the first time in our family's history, and I am going back thirty-seven years, that the whole complete family was a hundred percent legal. We killed our limit. We had our stamps, our licenses! The boat was legal. Plugs were in the gun. We were shooting the iron bbs and I'm going to tell you something; it was the most best, greatest feeling that I've ever had in a duck blind. And now from being away from it, my views have changed okay? Since then, I have become a Marsh Manager. I manage and I patrol twenty-eight thousand acres of land. In fact, this section that we're doing is in it. I have come to appreciate things that I took for granted. I'll never take them for granted again, because we don't know how lucky we are; just being able to be here and have the opportunity to take and be involved in such a wonderful sport. We're very lucky. The market hunting days are behind us. It's a thing of the past. I have a lot of good memories, and a lot of bad memories. And if I had to do it all over again, I'd do it the way I am doing it right now. 'Cause I'm going to tell you what; these poor birds, they got so much against them right now. They got pollution. They got asshole duck hunters, who just don't care. They got people up in Canada and the northern part of the country drying up the little potholes. You take and put everything into the pot, okay, and nothing comes out. And who suffers? The sportsman. The guy like myself now, who wants to be able to be a part of this new movement and still be able to enjoy the things that I was brought up to do. Right now, I'll tell you what; you couldn't get me to do nothing wrong for nothing. If I had to do it wrong, I wouldn't do it. I wish everybody would have that same attitude. It would help out a little bit. We're lucky in a sense that we can take and preserve this. *We've got the opportunity here to do it, you understand?* We can change this, and if it means working with the local Game Wardens or the Federal Agents, you're supposed to do that! And I honestly and truly believe that. I tell you what; the State Agents, it don't make no sense to try and take and work with them because the politicians has got them bought off. The only people, you know, who's really feared down here is the federal agents. The only problem is they don't have enough federal agents to cover these hundreds of thousands of acres of land. You can only be in one place at one time.

MR. HALL: Dennis, does law enforcement work?

MR. TREITLER: I tell you what; on a federal level, without a doubt. When these boys were caught at the Island, it was like a thunderbolt and a lightening rod coming out of heaven, and putting the fear of death in about two thirds of the people out here. Down here, nobody's got caught yet, in this little community.

MR. HALL: Well, that bunch that got caught over there; looking back now on this year, is that saving some ducks?

MR. TREITLER: Some. Okay, but look, for the four or five guys that got caught over there, you've got twenty that took their place. So you got to think about that, okay?

MR. HALL: It's a constant battle.

MR. TREITER: It's a war! Hey listen; this is just like when I was in Viet Nam, okay? This is a war! And the poor duck loses all the way around. He can't win!

MR. HALL: Dennis if I told you that there's no figures when they add up how many ducks are being killed for the illegal kill, what would you say about that?

MR. TREITLER: I'd believe that! In fact, I tell you what; if you came up with a figure, I'd call it a lie. Cause there ain't no way you can tell. There's just no way, and look, not just with the ducks. Down here, okay look, being raised in this little community where everything down here is edible and it's good to eat, okay? Like right now, we're sitting here and they got bands of [sounds like] beacraush that are flying behind us right now. After you took and killed your limit on ducks you'd want to take and, you feel like to you want to eat some beacraush or some grobecks or something or some cranes or herons, you just wait till they pass over and you kill what you wanted. You bring them home. You take and eat them. The old man, we never could afford chicken and that. Chicken and store bought meats and stuff. It was always rabbits and deer or alligator, squirrels, doves but our biggest table fare in the summertime and the spring was beacraush and grobecks. Even to this day, I *love* a jambalaya made with beacruash and grobecks. I love it with a passion! Yesterday, we when to go take a check the little area out where we were going hunting. And we could have killed about fifty or sixty grobecks without no problem. Wouldn't even have had to worry about being caught because the man wasn't out. And usually, everybody knows when the Game Warden goes out. Cause they keep their little boats down here over by the marina, and when they see the guys going out, the whole little community knows it. It's like the plague, it spreads around so quick! "Hey, The Man is out, just watch your self!" Okay? He wasn't out yesterday. I could have killed these grobecks, brought them home and made me the biggest, finest pot of jambalaya that a body could ever want to eat. But it was wrong, and I didn't do it. And I don't regret not being able, you know, not killing them. Because I know that these birds, they don't have too much of a chance 'cause they are still killing the s--- out of them right now! But I didn't contribute to wiping them out. In the back of my mind, consciously or subconsciously I'm at peace with my self. It's just a shame that a lot of people don't take and think like this.

This blind that we've got, okay? This is a natural blind. This is the way that we take and hunt. We don't build these big, giant man made blinds. It's not natural. We take

and make a little hole here in the prairie. And whenever we call, okay, like, I'll see a little gang of ducks coming and I'll put a little series of calls on them. But never look at the ducks, never. Our face is always down in the grass. The ducks themselves are telling you what they're going to do just by the sounds of their wings. ...tempered shim stock brass. This one here was made on the deck of a Destroyer in Charleston, South Carolina in 1966, and I still got it. Believe me, this thing still has made a lot of ducks pay a serious price, the ultimate price; their life. We used to take, and we used to go to these duck called contests and to us it was the biggest, greatest thrill. All the other kids would, you know, they were going out and going to the shows and going dancing and going to the skating rink and all of that. And for our family and our friends, okay? It was duck calling. Everything was duck related. Duck hunt, duck this, duck that, decoys! We used to practice for the duck-calling contest for one solid year. In other words, say the duck-calling contest is usually around the beginning of November. We would take and go to the duck-calling contest. The next day, we started practicing for the contest the following year! And we did this every day, seven days a week, for one hour after supper, every night! And we did this, oh my god, fourteen or fifteen years. That's how much we practiced and trained. Our whole young life was centered around ducks. You could probably understand why I'm so, why I can talk about this with such authority. It's because I've lived it for my whole life! But I'm going to take and give you a couple of little notes on this duck call. When we called, okay, and as I mentioned earlier, we never ever showed our face. We always took and kept our head down in the grass. And for some reason or other, this brass in the grass, it sounds even more like a real duck, than a real duck does itself. Okay, what I'm going to do, I'm going to take and give you a, you know just a little note. I'm going to show you basically how we did this, okay? Just visual, okay, maybe we see thirty-five or forty ducks banking like this. Okay? When we'd see them the first thing we'd do is take and put our head down, okay? And just a little bit of calling. [Makes a call on his duck call. Surrounding birds respond] with the corn in the pond and about sixty or seventy decoys, just that little bit of calling you would actually hear the wings, the wind going through the wings of the ducks coming over the decoys, okay? Most of the time they'd land on the first shot. But plenty of times they'd pass you up, especially on the bigger ducks. We'd take a put another little bitty note on them [demonstrates more calling] that usually did the trick, ninety-nine percent of the time. We take and sit there, and you can imagine with the ducks sitting in the decoys, okay? And we always had open spots in the decoys. We would take, and plenty of times they'd be scattered a little bit, we'd just take a beat on the side of the shell bucket. [Demonstrates the sound this makes by doing it] and he'd do the same thing and stop. And the ducks would bunch together. Right when they bunched and as soon as they stopped, ten loads in them. And most of the time it was eighty percent of the ducks. I'll tell you, you just don't know how devastating the s--- can be! Believe me, you just don't know until you actually see it, and you see what this gun and this duck caller can do in the hands of a massed up market hunter or a professional hunter. I don't consider myself to be that good, but my Dad; I'd put my Dad against anybody, anywhere, any time. He's almost seventy right now, and he still shoots. We took him when we made our hunt

there at opening day there, last weekend, there. I killed my four ducks with four shots. He killed his four ducks with one shot! After the hunt was over with his said, "Well, you know, I can't move too good, my reflexes is a little slow. But my finger and my I will go with me to my grave." And I told him, I said, "Pops, I believe your right!" And I said, "if I could get one thing from you, more than anything, I'm not interested in the few little dollars you have, or your duck callers, I made them. I'm not interested in your little decoy collection. What I'd like to get from you is your mind and your finger, that's what I'd like."

MR. HALL: Dennis, your father had a strong influence on you when you were a boy and still does.

MR. TREITLER: Oh my god! I'll tell you what; he's a master hunter. He's a master duck hunter. And you can believe me when I'm telling you, just to be in the blind with him, not just because he's my Dad, okay? He was perfection. Everything was done precisely. The shells were laid out in the shell bucket perfect. The shell bucket had a place for the duck caller. It had a place for a bottle of wine. His rain gear. Everything! Everything was laid out perfect. He shot an L.C. Smith double barreled .20 gauge. I've got the gun now. We've retired it. I went and bought him a brand new gun and he bitches and complains, "I want my old gun back!" He's got a brand new Remington. He's just at ease with that gun. With him picking that gun up okay? It's like the average business going to the keyboard on his computer or his typewriter. It's just, for him to pick the gun up, okay? It's like an extension of his body. You know? He's just that good. He's a gentleman duck hunter, and he's perfection.

MR. HALL: But even going back to old days, right now, he still fears the law?

MR. TREITLER: I tell you what, look; as you know, okay? he wouldn't come out here. Because he was so afraid that he was going to take and get booked, okay? For talking about this or possibly lose some of the little retirement benefits and stuff that he has. Once he makes his mind up, okay? The Pope couldn't have made him change it. God couldn't make him change it. He wouldn't come out here. Really, honestly and truly, I don't belong here telling you this, because I'm just a student. I've done this. He should be here because he's one of the last of his kind, one of the last of a dying breed that you're never, going to ever see again! The pictures and stuff we have of a lot of the hunts that we made and a lot of kills that we made are put in a vault right now. It's priceless. He should be here telling you this, because he could speak with more authority than I can. When all of this was going down, I was just a kid.

MR. HALL: Dennis, if you were a kid down here in south Louisiana and your Dad outlawed ducks, the kid's going to do it isn't he?

MR. TREITLER: Certainly! Hey look, the biggest thing down here was, you know, and everybody had, like, an idol. There was always the trapper, the best trawler, and there was always the best duck hunter. And Pops was the best, and he's still the best duck hunter down here. He's seventy-something years old! He could look at a drove of ducks, tell you what they are, if they come to the decoys, if they interested in coming to the decoys, and where they gonna set, just by looking at them! That's how good he is.

MR. HALL: Well this is a tradition. Killing ducks in south Louisiana.

MR. TREITLER: Yeah! This thing's been handed down from his Dad to him. From his Dad's Dad, to his Daddy; from my Grandpa, to my Dad and he handed down to me, and it stopped, right here. My son isn't going to be an outlaw! And I don't give a s--- what nobody says, he ain't outlawing; if I got to book him and put him in jail myself! He's going to respect this last little bit that we have here. And he's going to appreciate it!

MR. HALL: Well Dennis, how do we make the other people realize what you've realized?

MR. TREITLER: Boy, I'm going to tell you what; that's a hard question. Two things; a hundred times stronger law enforcement and penalties and sentences that can't be changed.

MR. HALL: In other words, those guys going to jail, spending a long time in prison has had an impact?

MR. TREITLER: Some, but not enough. They only did three weeks! They got to do a year! A whole year, maybe two years! I don't think it's strong enough. I don't think the penalties are stiff enough.

MR. HALL: When the rich guys, the "sports" as yall call them, would come out from town, they'd violate too if they got the chance?

MR. TREITLER: I tell you what, look; most of the time when the old man used to take the politicians down here in the Parish, he always got the choice "sport". Most of them couldn't shoot worth a s---. All that these guy were was mostly an asset to the business community. In so much as they kept Remington in business.

MR. HALL: But they would violate the laws?

MR. TREITLER: If they could! Look; hell they'd shoot up fifty to a hundred shells. Most of the time they wouldn't kill nothing. The old man would take and kill whatever they wanted for them in a couple of shots. It's not that the ducks weren't here, okay?

These people, they'd see so much, and they'd excited that they really wouldn't aim. They'd point the gun up there and hope they'd hit something.

MR. HALL: But the local people violated the law, and the "sports" that came down here...

MR. TREITLER: Violated it with them. They did the same thing. From the local milkman to the biggest politician. He couldn't kill the ducks and he wanted "x" amount of ducks to take and maybe throw a little party, or to have a little something. Plenty of times, okay? If they didn't have time to go duck hunting, they'd call the old man up. Hell, not even the old man, they'd call me up! "I need "x" amount of teal ducks", or "x amount of widgeons, popupbarts, shorebirds, yellow legs," anything they wanted. All they did was make a phone call, the next day they had it. It was that simple.

MR. HALL: It has been a strong tradition to take migratory birds whenever you wanted them and as many as you wanted?

MR. TREITLER: That's correct! I'll tell you what; like I say, up until the time when I was eighteen we'd start getting ready when the first teal ducks came down around the first week in September. That was like our whole deal, from September all the way til March. We was in the prairie messing with the ducks. Mostly in the evening time and at night. But we was here. When the average guy was up there breaking bread, we was out here busting our ass, and killing ducks. Selling them, or whatever. But like I say, we didn't think anything was wrong. We didn't think that it was a crime to do this. It was a job, and we did it, and we were good at it.

MR. HALL: But the "sports" them in the same way?

MR. TREITLER: Sure, if they could! Plenty of them couldn't kill them because the just weren't good enough shots. Some of them were good shots, and they killed just as many of them as we did. Like I said earlier, when you got a couple of hundred pounds of corn sitting twenty-five or thirty feet in front of you, and you take and put two or three hundred ducks in the water, how hard is it to miss? You know? Like the old man used to say; he used to tell us boys, he would tell them, "Allow them a chance, allow them a chance. Don't shoot them till they stops swimming". And I tell you what, look; that was his saying, and them sombitches would kill a lot of goddamned ducks doing it like that too! You know? They'd go in with the legal limit. We'd come back out at night. The ducks would be gutted. They only thing that we kept was the hearts, the livers and the gizzards; for us. They'd be gutted. They'd be put up in plastic bags and iced down. They would come back down at night, pick up their ducks and go home.

MR. HALL: The "sports" would come back down and get their ducks?

MR. TREITLER: Sure. They doing that right now! Right now! They go out with the limit. How do you know what I killed? How can you know, when you stop me over there by my boat, and I got four? And this prairie is so goddamned big; how do you know I just killed four. You're checking me. I'm legal. I got all my little Ted Williams s-- on. My little camouflage stuff. I'm Mr. Sportsman! But in fact, I'm the biggest outlaw sonofabitch that walks. [Speaking as if he were a "sport"] I got whatever I want to kill in the prairie. You don't know that. I go back, you go back up to your office and right at dark, I'm coming back out here and getting my ducks and going home. I done got the kids ready. The baskets is full of paper and we pick ducks all night. And you think in your heart and soul, "damn, I did my job! These guys are legal." But in a sense, okay? You ain't doing your job.

MR. HALL: Well, most of the time, I've watched the hunts that

MR. TREITLER: I'm sure. I'm sure you have. And like to told you, look; you know a long time back, you almost had me; very close, but close only count in horseshoes. And that's all I'm telling you!

MR. HALL: But while you've been sort of on my team for some time, Dennis!

MR. TREITLER: I'm gonna be on your team forever. From now on! You can count on me! Just like I agreed to do this. I want to see this s--- stopped. I want to see it stopped. I want my kids; I want my little Grandson; my little Grandson is everything to me right now. I want my Grandson to be able to come sit in a blind and sit next to Papa and I want Papa to teach him what to do, and to do it right! And I want him to be able to tell his sons. 'My Papa was an outlaw and he stopped because it was wrong! And he thought about me and you and your kids and their might be something later on for us to enjoy; the things that he loved so much!' This is life here. This is what life is all about. We take it for granted. This is all taken for granted. When we come out here, we don't know how very fortunate we are, to be a part of this. I realize it now. I am forty-one years old. Two thirds of me is over with. So the last little third I got, it's going to be done right. It's so important to me.

MR. HALL: Dennis, the ducks that are killed illegally, if they were allowed to live, do you think we'd have more breeding birds than Canada?

MR. TREITLER: I tell you what, look; just with us alone, just us, just my family; I figure just in this area here, there might be maybe another two or three million. Because I tell you what; when we kill the birds, okay? We killed breeding birds, birds that were paired. They were getting ready to go up north to breed. And that's what we killed.

MR. HALL: And it still goes on, and there's less ducks?

MR. TREITLER: Oh yeah! You got to know this! Okay? Like your wife or your mother or somebody cooks a big pot of stew; the whole family sits down and gets a bowl full. You ain't got enough. You're still hungry. Y'all go back to the pot again; sooner or later, the pot's going to empty! There's no more to take. We're right before that stage from what I can see right now. I don't think, maybe it's not as bad as what I might say it is, but in my heart and soul it's bad. Because this s--- should have been stopped a long time ago. I am on your team! You can take me to the bank! That's just the way it is. And I hope five million people see this, and they'll know just exactly how I feel; how I stand. I'll go down standing like that! You know? There's nothing I won't do to help the man, but I'll tell you what; the s---t's got to stop.

MR. HALL: Dennis, do you still like to come out here, just like you used to?

MR. TREITLER: Yes, I am going to tell you something; I don't know of too many men who really enjoy their job as much as I enjoy mine. I live my; every morning before my alarm clock goes off, I am waiting for it go off. I am planning my day's work. And this is seven days a week. And I've been doing this for my whole life. This prairie here, this gun, this pirogue here that you're in, this is all a part of me out here. When I die, I want to be put here because this is me. I am a very, very lucky man. Very lucky. The good Lord has given me all of the things in life that I have always wanted. This is my life out here. And I want to help it get better and I am going to do whatever it takes to do it. It's just that simple. And I don't care whose feelings or whose feet get stepped on, whose feelings get hurt, or who gets burnt. I'm going to do it.

MR. HALL: So you think everything's in trouble really?

MR. TREITLER: Yeah, I really do. I think it takes a hundred thousand people like you who are twenty times tougher that you are to straighten it out. And I still don't think it's going to get straightened out right away.

MR. HALL: Do you think I'm doing the right thing, you know, how persistent I am in doing these things?

MR. TREITLER: Sometimes I go to bed at night and I say a pray for you. To give you more strength and more determination and more guts and more courage and more everything, to be tougher that what you are. You could stand right here, where I am standing at right now and look out at this prairie here in the wintertime and see thousands of muskrat nets, thousands! You could walk from nest to nest. A man could make a very good living out here in these "boondocks", like they call them up the road. You'd never had to take an oar to anybody.

MR. HALL: What did he say?

MR. TREITLER: He said, "One of these days, a man's not even going to be able to take and kill ducks at all. And it's coming." That's when I told him, "Pop's you're full of s---. There'll always be ducks. Let's hurry up and get these things cleaned so we can go load them shells up so we can go hunt tomorrow." And that was it. But it come to pass. He was right, I was wrong. I can see all of the things he said.

[Mr. Hall concentrates on filming, and giving instructions; asking Mr. Treitler to paddle.]

MR. TREITLER: Is this going to be on there?

MR. HALL: Yep.

MR. TREITLER: If them people come down here with a SWAT team and put me in jail. All I'm going to tell you, okay? Of if I get bumped off or if the next time you come down here and you see my trailer is burnt! [Laughing] Put me in one of them camps around Ponchatoula somewheres, that's all I ask. Boy, I love that place!